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9 OCT 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Vietnam Conflict: Factors Bearing on the Issue
of Negotiations

This memorandum presents, in outline form, an analytic summary of the major factors bearing on the issues involved in arranging a negotiated settlement to the Vietnam conflict, particularly those factors which derive from the Vietnamese Communists' concept of the struggle and their assessment of its present status. The judgments made of current Vietnamese Communist attitudes and intentions are based primarily on the following pieces of evidence:

(1) The documentary record of [REDACTED]

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(2) The NLF political program published by Radio Hanoi on 1 September 1967;

(3) The article by Lao Dong Politburo member General Vo Nguyen Giap (Defense Minister of the DRV) serialized in Nhan Dan on 14-16 September and broadcast by Radio Hanoi on 17, 18 and 20 September 1967;

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1. The Differing Concepts of the Vietnam Conflict: Central to the whole issue of negotiations is the fact that the U.S. Government's basic concept of the Vietnam conflict and what that conflict involves is radically different from the Vietnamese Communist Party's concept of the struggle and the issues at stake.

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a. The U.S. concept holds that those Vietnamese who live south of the 17th Parallel have the right to independence and separate political existence, that the conflict derives from North Vietnamese aggression. In U.S. eyes, North Vietnam is attempting to acquire political control over and dictate the political future of South Vietnam by force of arms. In simplest terms, the basic U.S. objective is to persuade or compel North Vietnam to leave its neighbor alone.

b. The Vietnamese Communist Party, which controls and essentially is the government of North Vietnam, rejects the thesis that South Vietnam is entitled to separate political existence. Its concept of the struggle is rooted in the notion that "Vietnam is one." By definition, therefore, there is no issue of North Vietnamese aggression. The only foreign intervention is U.S. intervention (plus that of America's allies or, in North Vietnamese terminology, "satellites"), the U.S. is the only "aggressor." All that the Vietnamese who live north of the 17th Parallel are doing is helping their southern compatriots liberate the southern part of their country.

c. These radically different concepts of the basic issues involved not only complicate communication between Washington and Hanoi, they produce a situation where each party's concept of a minimal acceptable settlement is something the other party would regard as defeat or surrender.

2. Hanoi and the National Liberation Front: For all practical purposes, the National Liberation Front (NLF) is under Hanoi's absolute political control and parrots Hanoi's line with only those cosmetic variations essential to support the fiction of the NLF's political independence.

a. As Giap puts it, South Vietnam is the "great frontline of the Fatherland" and the South Vietnamese people (i.e., the Front) have shown themselves "worthy of the confidence of the whole nation and of President Ho."

b. In its September 1967 program, the NLF pledges itself "to strive, shoulder-to-shoulder with the Vietnam Fatherland Front to fulfill gloriously the common task of fighting against U.S. aggression to liberate the south, defend the north, and proceed toward the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland." This implied

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parallelism with the Fatherland Front is significant and revealing. The Fatherland Front (lineal descendent of the Viet Minh and Lien Viet Fronts) is the Communist Party's Front structure in North Vietnam, just as the NLF is the same Party's Front structure in South Vietnam.

c. All of our available evidence indicates that the NLF is under the absolute control of the Peoples' Revolutionary Party (i.e., the southern branch of the Lao Dong) and that the PRP takes its orders from the Lao Dong Politburo in Hanoi. Thus the Vietnamese Communists have essentially only one political position and program: Hanoi's. There is no significant separate southern voice, position or program.

3. The Communist View of the Issues: In Vietnamese Communist eyes, the objectives of the current struggle are (in Giap's words) "to protect the north, liberate the south, and proceed toward reunifying the country" i.e., putting all of Vietnam under Communist Party control. This same litany is echoed in the NLF program, which amplifies this theme by spelling out the following as the immediate "tasks and objectives of the South Vietnamese people."

- a. "To unite the entire people,
- b. "resolutely defeat the U.S. imperialists' war of aggression,
- c. "overthrow their i.e., the imperialists' lackey puppet administration i.e., the GVN,
- d. "establish a broad national union and democratic i.e., Communist administration and build an independent, peaceful, neutral and prosperous South Vietnam i.e., a 'progressive, socialist state', and
- e. "proceed toward the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland."

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4. Reconciliation and Coalition: Despite U.S. dissatisfaction with the overtures the GVN has been willing to make in the direction of reconciliation and possible future cooperation with nationalist elements in the NLF, in point of fact both Hanoi and the NLF are much more obdurate and much less forthcoming on these issues than the GVN has been.

a. Both Giap's speech and the NLF program refer consistently to Saigon's leaders as "imperialist lackeys" and "country-selling traitors."

b. The NLF program explicitly notes that to achieve its goal of "a broad and progressive democratic regime" it will be necessary to "abolish the disguised colonial regime established by the U.S. imperialists in South Vietnam, to overthrow the puppet administration, hireling of the United States, not to recognize the puppet national assembly rigged up by the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys, to abolish the constitution and all anti-national and anti-democratic laws enacted by the U.S. imperialists and the puppet administration."

c. Recent Hanoi and NLF statements, in short, contain no hint of any genuine Communist interest in a modus vivendi with the U.S. and the Saigon Government or in any political settlement other than the acceptance of NLF /i.e., Communist/ control over South Vietnam.

5. The Communist Assessment of the Present State of the Struggle:

a. The Vietnamese Communists see the struggle in Vietnam as an integral -- and, presently, the crucial -- aspect of the worldwide "national liberation struggle" of "progressive peoples" (including U.S. negroes) against the forces of imperialism and "neo-colonialism" headed by the United States. No American proponent of the domino theory could be more emphatic or explicit on this point than Giap or the authors of the new NLF program.

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b. The Vietnamese Communists acknowledge U.S. power and the fact that this power has created problems, but they voice complete confidence in their ability to cope with U.S. military might and inflict a political defeat on the U.S. in Vietnam and, eventually, throughout the world. One would, of course, expect the Communists to adopt a confident public pose, but a close examination of the available evidence indicates that this air of confidence in ultimate political success is not feigned.

c. In no small measure, this confidence derives from Hanoi's conviction that it has already inflicted one major politico-military defeat on the U.S. In Giap's analysis, the U.S. has three basic strategies for pursuing its world-wide "neo-colonialist imperialism": special war, limited war and general war.^{*} Giap argues that the Vietnamese Communists have already defeated America's "special war" in Vietnam and that the mid-1965 injection of U.S. troops into the struggle signalled this defeat. He further argues that the U.S. has neither the will nor the inclination to initiate general war. Thus, the Vietnamese Communists can win if they prove themselves able to cope with America's "limited war." This is the basic theme of Giap's whole speech, which is entitled "The Big Victory; The Great Task." The "big victory," is the defeat of the imperialists' "special war"; the "great task" is coping with their "limited war."

d. Giap argues, with apparent conviction, that despite the difficulties created by American might, the Vietnamese are in fact successfully coping with the imperialists' "limited war." He contends that the Vietnamese have created "strategic problems" which "are puzzling and very urgent for the U.S. imperialists. From Johnson and McNamara to Westmoreland," Giap continues, "they have all clearly realized their bogged down and deadlocked situation but have not yet found any new solution. They have, at

^{*} "Special war" involves the use of American cadre (advisors) but not American troops; "limited war" involves using American troops but in a localized conflict; "general war" means global military conflict.

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last, resorted to the troop-reinforcement measure. However, they are encountering big difficulties with this problem. If small reinforcements are sent in, it will be impossible to remedy the situation of the U.S. troops who are endangered on the battlefield. If large reinforcements are sent in, this will greatly influence the U.S. people's political and economic life and the U.S. strategy in the world and will not succeed in saving the U.S. imperialists from complete failure."

e. Giap also argues another point central to the Vietnamese Communist assessment: that the prolonged struggle is generating ever stronger political problems for and pressures on the U.S. Government. As Giap puts it: "In the international arena, the U.S. imperialists are also confronted with new difficulties ... In the United States itself, the Johnson government is confronted with the contradictions among the U.S. ruling clique and the U.S. people's increasingly stronger protest. The U.S. Negroes' boiling and widespread struggle is a fierce offensive blow dealt both at the Johnson clique's domestic and foreign policies. Never before has U.S. President Johnson been so deadlocked as he is now. On 14 August 1967 U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT admitted that war, racial conflict, the growing budget deficit, and troubles with the Congress, with the allies, and with the dollar are bad news which are pressing the government from all directions. Suddenly, the situation at the White House has become like that of a building whose roof is about to cave in."

f. The themes explicitly elaborated by Giap are echoed throughout the new NLF program. The basic Communist position on the present state of the struggle seems to be that the Communists can win because, despite U.S. power, the Vietnamese Communists can prolong the military struggle until political pressures force the U.S. to accept political defeat. The Communists' private assessment is almost certainly somewhat more complex than this since the COSVN high command must recognize -- as must Hanoi if COSVN reports honestly -- that all is not going well for the Communist cause in South Vietnam. This peeps obliquely through the lines in the NLF boast that,

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"The liberated areas have continuously expanded and now make up four-fifths of the South Vietnam territory with two-thirds of its population."

Not only is this claim patently false, it is also no sign of "progress," since this is what the NLF was claiming two years ago. The available evidence suggests that Hanoi's private net assessment is that erosion of the U.S. domestic and international political position is proceeding faster than erosion of the Communist military and political situation in South Vietnam, thus even if all is not going well in the south, Washington will still have to fold its hand first.

6. Current Communist Objectives: Nothing in current public or private North Vietnamese or NLF statements suggests any immediate Vietnamese Communist interest in peace, settlement or, for that matter, in what the U.S. would consider meaningful negotiations.

a. In Hanoi's eyes it is we, not they, who want to talk. Hanoi's current thinking is probably well (albeit unconsciously) summarized in Markovich's 4 October message to Kissinger that "... you should know that if the U.S. really wants to talk it is necessary first to stop without conditions the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV." The words are M's, but they probably reflect accurately the current frame of mind of Mai Van Bo and his Hanoi superiors.

b. Neither the NLF platform nor Giap's speech show any hint of interest in an interim settlement.

(1) In the NLF's words: "So long as the U.S. imperialists do not end their war of aggression, withdraw all U.S. and satellite troops from our country and let the South Vietnamese people themselves settle the internal affairs of South Vietnam without foreign intervention, our people will resolutely fight on until total victory."

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(2) Giap concludes his article with this peroration: "Under President Ho's 'determination to defeat the U.S. aggressors' 'flag, let all our army and people take advantage of victories to move forward. The Vietnamese people are determined to completely defeat more than a million U.S. puppet, and satellite troops. The U.S. imperialists' neocolonialist war of aggression will certainly be defeated. The people's war of the heroic Vietnamese people will certainly win complete victory!"

c. Though there is undoubtedly an element of bombast and propaganda posturing in the above statements, Hanoi does seem to read the odds as presently running in its favor, or at least shows no sign of feeling any immediate need to alter its strategy. Consequently, Hanoi shows no genuine inclination to negotiate (in our sense of the word) or accept anything less than political success.

7. The Bombing Issue: Hanoi has been quite explicit in its position that it will not talk with the U.S. so long as we continue bombing "and other acts of war" against the DRV. Hanoi has been consistently delphic on the question of its willingness to talk if the bombing (or, more accurately, bombardment) of North Vietnam were to cease. Given the North Vietnamese attitudes and assessment outlined above, it is probable that Hanoi is using the bombing issue as a cat's paw, wanting to throw the public onus for continuation of the struggle on the U.S. even though Hanoi itself has no current intention of settling for anything short of political victory. [REDACTED] documents indicate that Hanoi may be willing to talk in return for a certain kind of bombardment cessation (in effect, a very stiff price). Even if this is indeed Hanoi's position, however, that position is a complicated one incorporating certain essential elements outlined below.

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8. "Talks" Versus "Negotiations": As the [REDACTED] indicate, Hanoi almost certainly draws a sharp distinction in its thinking between "talks" and "negotiations." If the price were right, Hanoi probably would be willing to have its representatives sit down at a table with U.S. representatives and talk. Hanoi, however, shows no sign of serious interest in meaningful

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9. [REDACTED]

Hanoi is insisting on an unconditional cessation "of the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV" as its price for going to the table. (Though this point has not yet been explicitly flagged, Hanoi will probably insist that reconnaissance overflights are prohibited "acts of war.") Hanoi also seems to be insisting on at least a private official U.S. undertaking on this point, a document Hanoi could certainly publish if it saw advantage in doing so. The U.S. is basing its proposal on the assumption (not specifically included in the 6 October text) that Hanoi will not take advantage of the bombardment cessation, with the non-stated corollary that this means Hanoi would not increase the rate of resupply of the southern insurgents. Hanoi's price (for talks) is, in fact, a scenario in which North Vietnamese non-compliance would be almost impossible to prove to a skeptical world audience, particularly since there is no universally accepted baseline of a current supply rate (certainly none acknowledged by Hanoi) against which the case for an upward change can be argued. A continuation or resumption of cross-DMZ bombardment would constitute a prima facie case of North Vietnamese non-compliance, but almost nothing else would.

10. Hanoi's Gamble: Negotiations and a cessation of the bombing are logically distinct issues which have currently become fused. Hanoi almost certainly would welcome a respite from the bombing and would construe cessation of attacks on North Vietnam as a political victory it could exploit at home and abroad. Hanoi shows no sign, however, of serious interest in negotiations or settlement short of a Communist victory. If [REDACTED] documents are valid, Hanoi seems prepared to gamble by entering into talks (not negotiations) in return for a cessation of attacks on the north under circumstances which, in Hanoi's eyes, would make it almost impossible for the U.S. to resume these attacks without incurring great political costs.

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- 1 @ - SecDef, Rostow (WH), Katzenbach (State) from Mr. Helms
- 1 - PENNSYLVANIA file
- 1 - GAC Chrono ✓

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